

Ceteris Paribus

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Summary: The World's Greatest Detective is used to having his own way, used to getting what he wants when he wants it, and, most of all, he's used to winning. And when Kira comes into the picture? Prepare for the battle of the millenium. LightxL

Chapter 1: Praefatio

Disclaimer: I don't actually own DN. If I did, trust me. You'd know.

'Lo, all! Well, I'm working on the next chapter of Silence (and it is absolutely DELIGHTFUL so far), but right about now, my muse handed over THIS new idea, and I really think you'll like it.

FYI, all tense changes and odd grammar *stuff* is intentional. Misspellings are not, so if you find 'em, lemme know.

In case you're wondering, the title, Ceteris Paribus, means, "All other things held equal." Don't worry, it'll make sense soon.

Now, on with the show! Enjoy:

Published 10.26.11

It all started with a spark.

No, Quillsh reasoned, that wasn't right.

What it all started with, truly, really, started with, was Laura.

Beautiful, laughing, sometimes-too-quiet Laura.

He'd seen her, he'd met her, he'd spoken with her, he'd watched her.

And *then* there was that spark.

He'd been a young man then—well, not *young* exactly. 32. Young enough, though older than either of his (deceased) parents would have liked to have seen him marry.

But he *did* marry her, because he loved her and, impossible as it seemed to him, she'd loved him.

Laura had been 24, exactly. They'd married on her birthday, and Quillsh still feels a twinge of guilt for the fact that he had married someone so young (only 8 years younger than him, yes, but he meant *young*, the sort of youth that doesn't fade with age).

Laura was everything he was not. She was silly where he was serious. She was spontaneous where he was steady. She made mistakes, laughed, tried again, and laughed again when it *still* didn't work. He was careful—his mistakes were quiet, not to be aired or discussed.

Except with her—always, Laura was the exception to the rule. *Had* to be the exception to the rule.

He wasn't without his charms, he supposed. He was well-mannered, and devoted. But Laura was always the one to draw attention, even when she wasn't actively engaged in doing so. The eye just followed her, followed her grace and her understanding and her laugh.

He still remembered her laugh.

Well, that's not quite what he meant. He remembered *everything*, because Laura had been everything to him. But her laugh was especially familiar, especially raw, even years and years after her death. He could still hear her laugh sometimes, echoing around in his mind when he stayed still for too long.

That wasn't to say he was wasting away from the loss. It wasn't as though Laura's illness and subsequent death had *unraveled* him, he wasn't *dying*.

But he was pining. He was, to put it simply, missing her. He had a suspicion that he always would.

But.

It wasn't as though he had nothing to fill his time; it wasn't as though Laura had left him with nothing to remember her by.

Not a child—at least not *their* child, their flesh-and-bone child. They had tried—and with a fresh ache, he remembered that. Remembered the bewilderment, the doctors, the treatments. The adoption papers. The disappointment, again and again and again until finally Laura had said, sobbing in that too-quiet way of hers, *No more*.

He'd agreed with her. Instantly. What she wanted was what he wanted, especially when he could see her hurt.

It had hurt for years after that. Well into the time she was 30, and then 40. And it wasn't as though they weren't happy—they *were*, he stressed in his mind. He knew they were.

But sometimes—when she would wander the halls of his manor (inherited from his father, and his father's father before that), she would look at the closed doors of all the empty, dusty rooms. And sigh.

And then, well after their first meeting, their wedding, and well before the cancer set in, there was another *spark*.

Quillsh thought that it had been Laura who'd come up with the idea, but years afterwards, she'd insist that it was him.

And maybe it had been.

They couldn't conceive, they couldn't adopt—but with Quillsh's money and resources, they could still have children.

The idea of an orphanage began to take place. It had been shaped around late-night dinners and early morning walks. It had slowly squirmed into their lives, their thoughts, their very beings until they were consumed.

It wasn't a bad thing to be consumed by.

Papers were the first things to be taken care of. So many papers—licenses, inspections, permissions, meetings, investigations.

Next, the house itself. It was already large—enough to house perhaps a half-dozen children with some room to spare—but Quillsh and Laura took some of his funds (pocket change, really, after his successful inventions and patents) and expanded the building until it was a veritable mansion. 28 rooms, 20 bathrooms, two dining rooms, three living rooms, grounds twice as large as the house itself. A few secret passageways, some sliding doors in the walls, an attic and a cellar, just for fun. Orphans would need all the fun they could give them.

The house was completed and they were ready to file papers to begin receiving children when Quillsh's old friend—his oldest friend—Roger had stepped in with another idea.

With another *spark*.

He and Quillsh had spent many late nights studying the deteriorating state of the world. And although Roger, who had no one to distract him, to show him some of the world's fading beauty, had always been more passionate about it, Quillsh could never find any reason within himself to disagree with Roger.

Roger was right. The world was rotting. It was in chaos. Everything good seemed to be fading, and even to two jaded old men, innocence was no longer really innocent, and purity was really no longer pure.

At first, Quillsh had objected to Roger's idea outright. There were no such things as superheroes, he'd said. The orphanage had been designed to help children, to help them keep their innocence for as long as they could.

But then Laura had heard Roger's spark, and she had waited, and listened, and watched. And in the end, she had nodded and turned to her husband with a light in her eyes that he had never really been able to refuse.

And so Wammy's House for Extraordinary Children had been born.

They would have to be very careful, the three of them realized. Someone in the government would have to know what they were doing, yes, but not *everyone*. Luckily, Quillsh had a lot of money, and he did not object to using that money to fund a campaign or two.

They would have to keep the children secure, always hidden. Everything about the children had to be secret, or all of them would suffer for it.

There were no superheroes, yes, Quillsh had been right about that. But there were superhumans—men and women with intellect so great it almost frightened people. And while the idea of a vigilante or a "hero" physically taking on crime, physically pursuing villains and the ugliest, darkest parts of the world could never really work, the idea of an intellectual—a brilliant, determined, trained mind with a heart dedicated to justice and a brain dedicated to criminology—stopping crime was not nearly so laughable.

In fact, it was outright plausible. Possible, even, for them.

And then it wasn't just possible—it was happening.

The curriculum was brutal, the schedule was unyielding, and Quillsh knew that if *he* were the one attending the school, he wouldn't stand a chance. But then, he'd never classified himself as a genius.

Fairly brilliant, yes. But more creative and inquisitive and determined than anything else. The young minds that they would be training here would be so much more than that—they would be geniuses, pure intelligences, completely transcending normalcy and bursting into a realm all their own.

Finally, with everything in place, they began to explore their world, searching for the best and the brightest—all orphans—who they could mold into the world's greatest detective. In his mind—in all of their minds, really—it didn't matter that they'd never raised children before.

This child, they reasoned, would be different. These children would be so brilliant that it would be like raising tiny adults.

(And when Quillsh thinks back on *that* thought, he almost chokes on his laughter.)

And just as they'd started getting responses, just as they'd begun to interview children and administer the IQ tests and the EQ tests, tests for languages and for mathematics, suddenly, Laura was in the hospital.

Quillsh was there as well, naturally, and Roger joined them often, all their beautiful, shining plans put on hold. Even as Laura scolded him for staying with her through her illness instead of working on the orphanage, for once Quillsh ignored her wishes and stayed.

It was a short—a *brutally* short—cancer. Many can take years, decades to fully develop and destroy the host from the inside out.

But Laura had been sick for a very long time, and ovarian cancer isn't known for its kindness.

She had lasted a month.

A month and four days, Quillsh thought to himself. It wasn't long enough. No amount of time could have been . . .

It is over now, he'd told himself a year after she'd died, looking down at the young boy standing before him. It was over and all he could do was honor Laura's memory by finishing what they'd started.

He'd watched the pale-faced child, who was still swaying from his own loss just weeks earlier. Just five—he was only five-years-old, and he was listening and nodding to Quillsh's words like he *understood*, but he couldn't understand because he was *just a child*.

But he did. Quillsh knew he did. He could see the gleaming intelligence in those sharp eyes. He could see how the boy stood straight as a rod when Quillsh mentioned the rigor of his training, how little he'd be able to rest, how little he'd be able to play.

And that was all right, the boy had told him, because he'd never played much anyway.

And when Quillsh added that the boy would have to leave everything behind—including pictures, letters, clothes, *even his own name*, the boy hadn't even flinched. He'd listened the letter they gave him and swallowed and nodded.

The boy . . . he was perfect. He was everything that Quillsh and Laura and Roger had imagined. Brilliant, of course. Brilliant and multi-lingual (English, Spanish, Japanese, and French, with a few others on the way if Quillsh had anything to say about it) and serious and determined. The boy, despite his loss, held himself with a quiet confidence—which, Quillsh thought, if it couldn't be shaken by losing everyone he'd ever known, it wouldn't be shaken by *anything*.

He was exactly what they'd needed. Quillsh and Roger had looked at each other and in their shared glance, they'd agreed. This boy would be their first—and probably their best—addition to Wammy's House.

So Quillsh Wammy—soon to be known as just "W" for the sake of safety—smiled at the little boy and extended a hand, which the boy gingerly shook, as though he wasn't quite used to the gesture.

Which, Quillsh knew, he wasn't.

"Welcome to Wammy's House, Raito Yagami," Quillsh murmured.

And Raito Yagami had smiled back at him and said, "My name is R."

A/N: So yeah, I'm pretty psyched out of my mind about this one! Sorry about the brief intro, that was just the friggin' prologue! Other chapters should be 2-3 times longer, if I keep up with my regular style. And, if not . . . meh. I'm doin' my best here. Let me know if you have questions!

Oh, and as always, PLEASE REVIEW! :D

Chapter 2: Verbum

A/N: I am having FUN with this story. I did have one anonymous reviewer (why are the irritating ones always anonymous, so I can't ask them what they meant or to clarify?) who wrote this story off as, and I quote, "Oh...another one of these." And I was like, seriously? You don't even KNOW where I'm going with this one. Anyway, I hope this chapter will assuage any concerns people had about this story just being another one of those "Light goes to Wammy's and makes/doesn't make friends" stories. Not that I don't love those stories. I do, truly!

Anyway. Let's get this party started, y'all!

Published 11/1/11

December 3rd, 2004

Gentle yellow lighting warmed the capacious, high-ceilinged room, giving it the feel of an era long past—one in which it would have been firelight that would have been lighting the area. The curtains drawn tightly across each window turned the icy outside world into something of an enigma, and although the room's sole inhabitant did love a good mystery, he knew perfectly well that it was just past seven in the evening (though really, he knew that it was precisely 7:14 and 37 seconds, according to the watch he habitually wore, but that was just splitting hairs).

Glancing up from the exceptional little device spinning away on his left wrist, his eyes shifted instead to the papers in front of him. Tapered, strong fingers spread out the sheets and then raised them upright and jogged the little stack once before laying them delicately to one side of his desk. Restless amber eyes—the *only* restless part of his character—moved again from the papers to the watch on his wrist. A tiny crease appeared between his eyebrows, but he smoothed it out once he became aware of it.

He felt an urge to sigh, but instead monitored his breathing for a moment to make sure it was perfectly regular—and then, just as he was preparing to stand and make his way towards the stained oak door of his suite, a low knock sounded and echoed softly in the largely empty room.

"Come in," the room's occupant murmured, and the heavy door swung in noiselessly.

"R," Wammy said by way of greeting. He balanced a tray in one hand and held a manila folder in the other. "I apologize," he added, first setting down the tray on a low table in the center of the room, and then handing him the thick envelope. "I was detained for a short while by the other children."

R's eyes swept from the folder he was opening with careful hands to meet his caretakers'. "It's fine," he said, returning his attention to the papers in front of him. He turned and placed them on top of his keyboard. "It's all here, then?" he asked. His tone made the question sound more like a statement of fact than anything else.

Wammy nodded anyway. "Everything you asked for—the police reports from both countries, the enhanced photographs, and the relative worth of goods taken."

R nodded, once, and then turned his focused attention on the tray of food Wammy had set aside when he'd entered.

"I'll eat first," he said—hardly a momentous announcement, since they both knew he took his dinner at 6:45, and not any sooner. And rarely—this being one of those exceptions—any later.

Wammy nodded. "Is there anything else you need immediately?" he asked.

R paused for a moment, then shook his head. "No, not until I weigh the evidence against what I've already seen," he decided. "I will want to talk to the so-called victims eventually, but I need to get a better grasp on the case before I enter into any communications with the police or witnesses."

Wammy nodded again. "You won't be needing me to inform the police that you are taking on this case, then?" he asked.

"No," R agreed. "As I'm not certain that I will be. It is . . . intriguing, to be sure. But as of now, not any more than that. I'm not certain they'll need the detective R's help at this point. Perhaps later."

"And as for Denevue's most recent endeavor?" Wammy probed gently.

R stood and stepped over to the small table, gesturing behind himself as he went. He knelt on the floor and began to eat. He had still retained his habit of sitting on the floor to eat; it was something that Wammy had considered trying to change, but had then thought that it was such a small habit, and one that had virtually no effect on his work, so R might as well keep it.

"It's all there," R informed him, and Wammy moved to collect the papers on the left side of R's desk—his Denevue and Coil side. Leafing through them, Wammy nodded in satisfaction.

"You don't have to finish all the paperwork yourself, you know," Wammy told him, eyes still on the pages in front of him. "I am here to assist you with that—as are the local police force in Marseilles."

R nodded, laying his fork to one side as he answered. "I know," he said. "I . . . like it. It is most efficient when I finish it myself, and it does give me a stronger sense of achievement when it's all set in stone—or at least, set in black, size 12 font."

Wammy leafed through the papers, searching, until . . . "It was Tomas, then?" he asked.

R nodded again. "Yes," he said, and paused. He allowed himself a small smile as he added, "It was, in fact, the damn butler who did it this time."

Wammy smiled too, though he hid it behind the papers he was still overseeing. "Well, excellent work, then, R," he acknowledged. "I'll let La Police Nationale know that you've solved their mystery."

"Good. Transfer the payment into Denevue's account for now. We'll move the majority of those funds into my primary account once interest in the case has died down." R sounded distant as he attended primarily to his dinner. As Wammy watched, R divided his portion of meat into small, even portions, keeping each of the foods separate on his plate, before he began to eat. As usual, this sort of activity caused a twinge of guilt in the back of Wammy's mind, and as usual, he firmly drove it further into his subconscious. R was what he was, he did what worked, and he got everything done as quickly (quicker, even) as could be expected. So there was really no need for him to get worked up over such inconsequential behavior.

Wammy nodded. "I'll leave you, then, unless there's anything else?"

R shook his head. "No, so long as you'll let me know when Poland gets back to Eraldo Coil about the *cudzoziemiec* problem they're having in Krakow. I know they're currently deciding whether or not to request his services. And do also let me know if anything interesting comes up—anything that would be of interest to the detective R. Otherwise, thank you for the documents. I will let you know when there is any change in my determination to take the case."

"As always, I will keep you updated on any change. You don't need me to interrupt your sleeping schedule, though?"

After a moment's thought, R shook his head. "No, unless there is some sort of emergency," he said. "After all," he added with the barest hint of a sly smile, "the world runs on my time, not the other way around."

Wammy slipped the papers into an envelope he'd brought with him and nodded. "I'll see you in the morning, then, unless something changes."

"Good night," R agreed, and Wammy quietly took his leave of the suite.

After the door closed, R blinked a few times and looked down at his dinner. His lips twisted, just the smallest bit, but he forced it into a wry grin. Wammy *knew* he hated

cauliflower, but it was in season and Wammy could be obstinate. He ate it dutifully, even without Wammy here to see—especially without Wammy here to see. He needed to take care of his health as meticulously as he took care of everything, and if that meant eating everything on his plate (and it *did*), then that's exactly what would happen.

As Wammy exited, he closed the door gently behind himself, and then let out a little surprised breath as he saw a shadow standing just in the corner of his vision. Turning, he saw Roger waiting for him outside the room, and he smiled and made his way over to his old friend.

"How are the children?" Wammy asked. They both knew he didn't mean the children in general—they both knew that he was talking about a few particular children. One particular child. Mello.

"Fine," Roger said with a bemused smile. "Mello has been subdued, at the cost of a few bruises on the staff's part."

"If he doesn't learn to calm himself-" Wammy began.

"He will," Roger assured him, not even letting him finish the thought. They both knew they couldn't turn Mello out, not now. He had been here too long; it would be cruel (both to him and the rest of the world) to simply hand him off to another orphanage. "Matt is with him now."

"Matt," Wammy said simply. The word sounded suspiciously like a prayer. "That boy . . ."

"We'll never understand him—any of them, really," Roger agreed. "Frankly, I've given up trying."

"We never had so much trouble with R," Wammy remembered, somewhat fondly. It took him a moment, but he soon recognized Roger's silence for what it was, and asked, "What is it this time, Roger?"

Roger smiled at him again, and again it was not so much an expression of good humor as it was just a habit—a part of being near a very old friend. "R . . ." Roger began, trying to find a good starting place. It was a losing argument, he knew, so it was important that he have good footing in the first place. "He cannot possibly be happy, Quillsh. He is locked in that room day after day; he leaves only to go on-site, and that is rare."

Wammy spread his hands. "What would you like me to do, Roger?" he asked. "I don't tell him to stay in; I am in no way forcing his hand. R does what he likes. He always has."

"No," Roger said darkly. "He does what we like, and always has."

"So your issue is with his training," Wammy summarized. "Well, for God's sake Roger, I ask you again, what would you like me to do about it?"

"We have trained that boy to be a loner, an outcast—"

"He's not a boy anymore, Roger," Wammy reminded him. "25 is well past the age of being considered a youth."

"Not the point," Roger said. Wammy shrugged. "We have trained him to be alone, all these years, we've instilled in him a veritable fear of interaction—"

"But that fear isn't *there*, Roger," Wammy insisted. "You've seen him as well as I have. He is precise, well-mannered, graceful and socially competent in every situation. Whether he's with someone a fourth his age or four times his age. He is always polite; his interactions are always exactly appropriate."

"Exactly!" Roger exclaimed, then lowered his voice as he realized that they were walking past the children's bedrooms. "He is *exactly* appropriate. He is *precise*. There is no feeling in him. It is all calculation. It is all a . . . a game."

"I know I sound like a broken record, Roger, but what do you want me to do about it? R is perfectly competent in every social situation and you know it—whether or not it's genuine. He speaks well, he dresses well, he eats and sleeps well—"

"He does everything *well*," Roger emphasized. "Does he *ever* make mistakes?"

Wammy fixed him with a look. "I'm really not sure what you're getting at, Roger," he admitted. "You know that from the very beginning that we've trained him *not* to make mistakes. A normal person making a mistake is embarrassing at worst. R making a mistake . . . worlds could crumble."

"Is he even *human* anymore?" Roger pressed. "Have you checked? Does he breathe?"

"What on earth do you mean?"

"I mean that he has never had time to figure out who he is—he's always been who we've wanted him to be. Who we've molded him to be."

"Well, Roger, I don't mean to sound callous, but . . . yes, that's exactly right. Wasn't that what we agreed on, all those years ago?" Wammy asked. "Didn't we all look at the same lesson plan, the same ideals, the same qualifications, and agree that *this* was what our creation would look like?"

Roger made a quiet, frustrated sound. "Yes," he agreed. "Yes, we did, but I'm starting to think we were *wrong*, Quillsh," he said softly, urgently.

Wammy was silent for a moment. "I know it seems unnatural," he finally assented. "I know it is unusual—I know how he behaves is almost . . . inhuman. But the world is better for it. And don't think that I don't care about him, Roger," he suddenly warned. "I do—I've always thought of him . . . well, you know."

"And now?" Roger asked. "What do you think of him *now*?"

Wammy thought for a moment before answering. "I feel the same. But it is no longer on the surface, as it was when he was a boy. Now, everything is business. I would gladly be a father to him, Roger, if he ever *needed* a father. Right now, what he needs is a partner—someone to run errands and take care of him. And it's not ideal—it's not what I imagined I'd be doing at this point in my life. But we made him, and we'll take care of him. I'll take care of him."

They stopped and looked at each other just outside Roger's office. Then, with a sigh, Roger turned the key and they both went in, settling down into their usual chairs.

"I know," Roger finally admitted. He sighed and looked heavenward for a moment. "I know," he repeated.

"Then what is it that you want?" Wammy asked, not unkindly.

"I want . . . I want things to be different, for these children," Roger said.

Wammy thought about that. "You want us to change our curriculum. Even when it has turned out a perfect detective."

"It has turned out a perfect *machine*!" Roger snapped back, then again lowered his voice. "I want to see humanity in the children. Think of Near—"

"Think of Mello," Wammy interrupted. "I think he could do with a little less humanity, don't you? A little more control?"

Roger sighed again. "That's right," he said. "That's exactly right. We need a balance, Quillsh. Somewhere between Mello and Near. Our two best students, both hell-bent on their own self-destruction."

"So what do you propose?" Wammy asked.

"We need to personalize the curriculum, not change it. Not so much. Near is not the same as R. Mello is not the same as R. Matt, Linda, Xavier, all of them children are so different. What worked for R will not necessarily work for them."

Wammy nodded thoughtfully after a moment. "All right," he agreed. "I like where this is going. I'm not going to admit to making mistakes with R, Roger," he warned. "Because he turned out exactly like he was supposed to, there's no arguing that. Even if we're not quite sure what to do with the end result—he is what we'd anticipated. And more."

Roger looked as though he was going to argue that for a moment, then he closed his mouth and sat back in his chair. "All right," he agreed. "We won't talk about R. What's done is done, I suppose. You are closest to him, Quillish. You'll . . . you'll stop him, if he ever needs stopping?"

Wammy frowned a bit. "I'm not sure what that's supposed to mean," he admitted.

"I mean that you'll remind him that he's human if he ever forgets," Roger said. "That you'll be with him, right there to warn him off the path of cold inhumanity if he ever wanders down it."

Wammy nodded immediately. "Don't think I haven't thought it," he said. "I promise you that I will be there."

Roger nodded back and relaxed a bit. "Then you won't mind if I start making changes to the curriculum?" he asked. "After the disaster with A and B."

Wammy let out a distressed little noise at that. A's suicide had been years ago (though every thought of it still brings a fresh pang of awful, pressing guilt)—but the L.A. BB murders had been only a little over a year ago. Every time it was brought up, R got a peculiar light in his eyes, and Wammy was left to guess as to what it meant. He assumed it was guilt, but with R, it could be anything—guilt, yes, but also perhaps disgust, or sorrow, or even . . . admiration.

"Yes, we still have to talk about them, Quillish," Roger continued.

Wammy held up a hand. "I see your point," he managed. "Of course I do, Roger. We do not want a repeat of any kind of either B or A. The children haven't been told about them, correct?"

"Of course not," Roger agreed. "But the curriculum, Quillish, how we treat them—"

"Yes," Wammy agreed. "Yes, I suppose it could do with a little updating." He saw the look on Roger's face and amended, "Perhaps a lot of updating. But . . . damn, Roger, isn't it hard to admit we were *wrong*?"

Roger nodded slowly. "It makes me wonder if we were wrong about everything," he said quietly. "About R, even . . ."

"We can't think like that," Wammy said firmly. "As we've said, R is what he is."

"And the fact that you speak of him like that," Roger interrupted. "He is *what* he is. Not *who* he is."

Wammy made a defeated gesture. "All right," he said. "You win, Roger. We've made mistakes. I've been wrong. But I'm going to draw the line at saying that R is wrong."

Roger thought about that for a moment, then nodded. "All right," he acquiesced. "But as for the other children—"

"Draw up some plans—I'll help you if you want. We can individualize it," Quillish agreed. "It will be work, for us and for the staff, but it will be worth it if we can avoid anything like A or B."

"I've already thought of a few things—most particularly for our three top students," Roger admitted.

"Why them?" Wammy wanted to know.

"I suppose . . . they're often forefront in my mind," Roger said. "And the pressure's on them more than anyone, Quillish."

Wammy nodded. "So what have you—"

He stopped. They both stopped. Wammy's phone had begun blinking, showing that he had a message. It was either from R or from one of the various countries R helped, asking for his assistance. "One moment," Wammy said, scanning the screen.

He was silent. For longer than one moment. Then, he glanced up at the clock. Only about 8 p.m., still well within the time before R went to bed (that honor fell on 11 o'clock, exactly. Every night.).

"I'm sorry," Wammy said, standing. "R is going to want to see this."

"A new case?" Roger asked, and Wammy looked speculative—and more than a little skeptical.

"I'm not sure," he admitted. "But . . . it's something."

Roger nodded. "All right," he said. "We have plenty of time to talk later."

Wammy nodded distractedly. "In the meantime, work on the changes you'd like to see. Let me know if you have anything concrete," he said. He gave his old friend a brief smile, and then headed up to R's suite.

Two hours' worth of conversation and internet research (and a little NPA hacking) later, R sat back in his ebony leather chair, a pleased little expression playing around the corners of his mouth. "Yes," he said finally. "Yes, I think I rather like this." He crossed one leg over the other and scanned through the documents on his computer again.

"So, I take it you won't be taking that case in Thailand?" Wammy asked.

R glanced up at him, looking as though he'd quite forgotten Wammy was there. He studied him for a moment, and Wammy knew that his mind was moving at a million miles a minute, touching base on every lead he might have, every possibility there was with this new case, and that the attention he was giving to Wammy and this conversation was really miniscule in comparison. "Yes, that's right. And when Poland does call back—and I'm certain they will—stall. I'm not sure how much of my time I'll need to devote to this case, but I am willing to bet it's going to be quite a bit."

Wammy nodded. "Of course. Shall I contact the NPA?" he asked.

R immediately shook his head, tentative fingers brushing over his keyboard. "No," he murmured. "No, if I'm not mistaken . . ." he paused. Wammy knew better than to interrupt. R's fingers moved quickly over the keyboard this time, darting around as he checked and rechecked his information. "Yes," he finally vocalized. "Yes, it looks like the ICPO is meeting on this tomorrow."

Wammy stood immediately. "We'll need plane tickets, then," he said.

R glanced at the clock, expression a little dim. Wammy knew that look. R was irritated he wouldn't be getting his normal sleep hours in. Any deviation in his routine . . .

"I'll buy out the first class seats on the soonest Swiss Air Line flight to Tokyo, shall I?" Wammy asked. It wasn't really a question. It wasn't as though R was a particularly flashy person—not at all, really—but he appreciated privacy and he appreciated quality.

R cleared his face of his expression of mild discomfort (likely just now realizing that Wammy had seen it), and nodded. "That will be fine," he said.

Wammy headed for the door. "I will arrange the transportation," he said. "Will you need anything else?"

R shook his head immediately, his eyes already on his new puzzle again. "Let me know when we leave. It should be within four to five hours."

Wammy nodded. "I'll get back to you in less than half an hour," he said.

R waved him off distractedly as he began to submerge himself in this new case.

"Kira," R murmured as he heard the door close. He allowed himself to smile, just a little. His eyes studied the screen, intently. Hungrily. His smile grew, and he found himself quite unable to stop. He didn't *want* to stop.

For the first time in a while . . . for the first time at least since B's death . . . he was going to have *fun*.

A/N: WARNING: MUSIC NERD GIBBERISH AHEAD.

So, for each of my stories and each of the characters in the stories, I have a playlist that I use to help me get in the right mood for writing. For example, my Lady Gaga Pandora station helps when I'm writing Disorder, while Silence demands something more along the lines of Regina Spektor and/or John Reznik and Matchbox Twenty.

But for some reason, I was finding it tough to find a good station for this story. (Well, it didn't help that I was seriously struggling with characterization. I mean, I wonder how much of Light/L's characters are made from their atmospheres and how much can be attributed to basic nature? But that's another story.) Finally, though, I found it. My Beethoven channel on Pandora. It's perfect for Light's rigidity and formality, as well as his obsession with detail and even his tightly reigned in emotion. The thing—the beautiful thing—about Romantic music (and that's Romantic, capital 'R', as in the musical period) is that it still follows the strict guidelines and demanding mathematical theory behind music, but it does its damndest to inject *feeling* into what was becoming a somewhat formulaic musical experience. Now, I'm not saying that other musical periods were inferior; I'm just saying that I think that Beethoven and his peers work so well with Raito's character because he is like the music they wrote: tightly strung and according to theory, but with emotion running fierce and deep through him.

Wow, that was a lot. When I read that, I imagine myself saying it all in one breathless rush, since that's what it was like in my head.

Welp, that's it for now! Next chapter, you should all expect to see L! (I'm excited/terrified to write that.) In the meantime, review, please!

Chapter 3: Taedium

A/N: Hang on, everybody, 'cause here's where L comes in and he's . . . well, as usual, L's just a delightful little person, isn't he?

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L Lawliet didn't do boredom.

He *used* to feel bored—and he didn't like to remember that, to remember the crushing weight of the stupidity of his classmates combined with the incompetence of his teachers and finally, his own inability to shut off his brain.

Yes, he used to feel bored.

Until he realized that boredom isn't a feeling—it's a condition. An ailment. An illness. And like any other illness, there was a way to treat boredom.

Generally, L treated it with a haughty, caustic attitude and with no small amount of contempt.

Specifically, he treated it by finding something else—something *interesting*—to do.

The problem with geniuses, he thought while disassembling his mother's piano, is that once they find a particular way of thinking, they tend to get stuck. *And it's not like we're incapable of changing our minds*, he added, *it's just that we're so arrogant that we think that our way of thinking is the only way*.

Gently, he twisted the pin of middle C's string and pressed the key firmly. He listened for a moment, head cocked to one side, then nodded. The pressurized wood in the hammer looked strong still, even in a piano nearly 50 years old, so he pushed the soundboard gently and waited until he heard a *click* and then smiled to himself, pleased.

Tuning a piano—check. And all before breakfast, too.

He just had to make sure his mother didn't find out what he'd been doing.

His parents were generally supportive of his habits and idiosyncrasies, and they even helped cover the cost of his specialized classes when his own funds couldn't cover it. But if his mother ever found out he'd taken apart and then put back together her baby grand, he would be lectured and grounded before he could even drawl, *But Mom, I knew what I was doing*.

L found music fascinating. He didn't possess much talent himself—his voice was acceptable, in tune if not entirely pleasing to listen to, and he could play the piano and the violin well enough—but that didn't stop him from studying it.

It had pleased him greatly when his mother had placed him in piano lessons at his request and they (his teacher, his mother, and himself) had discovered that he wasn't much of a pianist.

He had learned the theory lightning fast, of course (music was all mathematics, when it came right down to it), and he could read music after a lesson or two, but he . . . he didn't have an ear for it, he supposed one might say.

His mother was baffled—why on earth would her brilliant son be *happy* when he found something that he couldn't do perfectly?

But that was just the thing (and it was the thing he couldn't explain to his parents either). Unlike most people, L had actually had to *look* for something he couldn't do well on the first try. All his life, all of the standard pursuits—academics, sports, and the like—had come easily to him. Much, much too easily. He'd been bored out of his mind.

Absolutely out of his mind. It had taken him to the point of near-insanity until he realized that he'd better find *something* to do with himself before he snapped and brought a gun to school. Or something. That was just an example, really.

(And besides, where would he even find a gun? This was Japan, after all, and it wasn't legal for civilians to own guns. He'd supposed that he could get his father's somehow, but he'd have to be careful about it and his father would notice it was missing in the morning before he left for work . . .)

Well. Once he'd found himself fantasizing about killing off a sizable portion of his known world, he'd decided that it was time to make a change.

His father had helped him get a job when he was 16, contacting the (ironically) weapons company that contracted with the NPA and passing him off as a technical writer. It wasn't a particularly interesting job, but it paid surprisingly well when he considered that all he had to do was write instructions on how not to kill yourself with a pistol or what the safety procedures were when the nuclear reactor started feeling a bit touchy. Then, once the paychecks had started coming in, the *real* fun started.

His mother had asked him what the point was of all this—and by all this, she meant the skydiving lessons, the SCUBA diving, his brief foray into the chemical engineering of makeup, the bookbinding class, the "Intro to Pottery" seminar, the protest he'd gone to, advanced capoeira, the old car engine he'd rebuilt, the gardening and cooking books he'd bought. And about a dozen other things he'd done in the past year or so. And that was another thing he couldn't really explain.

His family was *great*, it really was. His father was devoted member of the police force and was excellent at his job (although perhaps he spent a *bit* too much time there and not with his family), his mother was kind and caring and didn't mind cooking a little extra for him since he asked for sweets so often (although perhaps she spent too much time pushing her son to study, to excel, to be better and perhaps she cared a little too much about his test scores), and his little sister was bright and full of life (although perhaps she shouldn't be sneaking out late at night quite so much to party with her friends).

But they were *average*, and there was nothing L could do about that. Sometimes—mostly back when he'd been bored and furious and out of his mind with frustration—he wondered what the *point* of having a family was when they couldn't really *do* anything for him.

But of course that wasn't true. He knew that. His family loved them, and he . . . he mostly loved them back. He wasn't sure he was completely capable of loving someone "with all his heart" since it seemed like his heart didn't do anything without his brain's permission; and his brain wasn't exactly in tune with his emotions. But he liked them, more than he liked anybody else. He didn't mind being around them, and he was grateful for their support and their love. He supposed that without them life would seem much colder and darker.

At any rate, he knew that he would not be able to explain why he suddenly had about 30 new interests. They would look at him and furrow their brows and blink and not be able to see how he took no pleasure in things like schoolwork and tennis because schoolwork and tennis were so, so easy for him. To them, when they found something they were good at, it was thrilling. To L, he was good at everything, he understood everything, so where was the joy to be found in the average, everyday things he did?

Of course, there was an average, everyday thing he participated in that he wasn't perfect at—*not that I'm perfect at anything, perfection's just an illusion*—he reminded himself.

It was something so small, so seemingly inconsequential; and at the same time, it was one of the largest parts of his life.

Socialization.

L frowned as he reached school and stepped onto the grounds. It wasn't that he was incapable of socializing, if one took socialization at its denotation: "a continuing process whereby an individual acquires a personal identity and learns the norms, values, behavior, and social skill appropriate to his/her social position." But its connotation—the interaction of him with his peers, his ability to empathize, and the *desire*, especially to communicate with others—was another story entirely.

It wasn't as though L didn't have any friends—well, okay. He really didn't have any friends.

But it was more that he didn't *want* any friends—at least, none of the common garden variety that seemed to invade his school and choke him like weeds. He supposed that he wouldn't mind socializing if it were with someone else on his level, but he'd never found anyone quite that smart, and he didn't ever expect to.

And so, he made sure to fill his time with activities in lieu of another person with whom he could have a stimulating conversation. It wasn't a perfect substitute, but he was happy enough. Content, at least.

He weaved through the faceless, nameless masses in the hallways, walking slowly, treading carefully, until he reached his first class. He waited until the bell was about to ring before he slipped inside and into his seat—that way, no one tried to strike up a conversation with him. And when the bell rang again to dismiss class, he'd be up and out of his seat before anyone else had even started packing up.

Okay, so maybe it wasn't the healthiest way of dealing with people. And he certainly wasn't afraid of them, God knew they left him alone enough. (The class genius, the class freak; they thought they hated him because he was so weird, and yes, maybe that was part of it. But really it was because he was just so . . . smart. It was because he could go places they couldn't, because with a blink, they would all melt away, secondary to whatever he was thinking of at the moment. And they couldn't—or didn't want to—handle his self-imposed isolation.)

He sat normally, which didn't bother him nearly as much as when he was a child. He still sat a bit rigidly, he supposed, and he thought about making more of an effort to relax and mimic his classmates' posture, but then he just shrugged and slouched down further in the hard plastic seat that belonged to him for the next 55 minutes. They were just lucky he didn't bring his knees to his chest and crouch instead; that was much more comfortable, and he could think much better that way, since he wasn't constantly distracted with the idea of looking normal to the rest of the world.

Mathematics. First class of the day, and the best. He was in Multivariable Calculus, something he enjoyed to a degree. It wasn't particularly difficult, but he deliberately restrained himself from reading ahead in the textbook so he was forced to listen during class to absorb the new information.

It was funny, though; as with most subjects, whenever he "learned" something new, even if he really hadn't ever thought about it or hadn't ever come into contact with it before, it still felt painfully familiar. It just . . . made sense, he supposed. It was like he was taking 7 different classes on common sense and the world in general. For the average person, he thought, it would be like sitting down and realizing that today's lesson was about shapes and that a triangle had three sides and three angles, a square had four sides and four angles, and so on.

Common sense. Common knowledge. Not something you had to think about.

He shrugged a bit to himself and tried to remind himself that he didn't know everything (*but*, he thought with a wry smile, *I'm pretty close*) and that something in this school could take him by surprise. Probably.

Someday.

For now, he listened to the lecture about vectors in 3-dimensional space and resisted the urge to read ahead instead of listening to the teacher crawl along and cater to the lowest common denominator in the class.

Chill, he thought to himself. *I need to take my time with this, or 55 minutes is going to seem like 55 days.*

At the same time, though . . . listening to this lecture was going to take about 55 hours, so maybe it wouldn't hurt if he multi-tasked. He glanced at the board and read the questions they'd have to do tonight as homework, and then he flipped straight to the questions.

Without reading the material, and keeping at least a part of his mind on the lecture still going on, he tried each problem, working through it with just a basic understanding of vectors and what he considered to be common sense in general.

It was more challenging this way, more *fun* if he ignored the shortcuts they'd given him and instead relied on basic calculus and the theories and equations he'd already memorized to solve the problems. That kept him occupied through most of the class period, although the questions at the end went much faster, since the teacher had finished and he now had a better understanding of the material.

Minutes before the bell rang, he flipped through his homework, checking and rechecking the answers to make sure they were all right. He'd made sure to "show his work" too, since his teacher was unnerved by the very few steps he usually took to solve problems. Instead, he solved them the way he was supposed to, by following formulas and emulating the examples in the book. He nodded to himself and tucked the paper away into his backpack where it would languish and presumably die.

Looking around, he realized that he'd gotten through first period without wanting to kill anybody even once. Victory.

As predicted, he was out of his chair and on the way to his next class before the echoes of the period bell had stopped sounding.

He wasn't *afraid* socialization. He *wasn't*. It was just so unpleasant usually that he didn't see the point. He supposed that maybe he could have taken one for the team, just to put his mother's mind at rest. She worried about him, he knew. Especially when she'd pick him up from school or see him at his father's work parties—when she saw how very little he cared to communicate with the rest of the world. She worried.

Oh well, L thought, slipping his bag off his shoulder and onto the floor next to his desk. *Her loss.* With a frown, he removed his blazer, then paused and grudgingly slipped it back on when the teacher glared at him.

If math was his favorite part of the day, it all went downhill from there. Math, then Japanese (which he was more than fluent in, but was required for all students), then history of Asia, and then lunch. By the time lunch rolled around, he was usually in something of a daze, eyes glazed over from the effort he put forward every day to listen and behave.

Lunch usually cheered him up, since his mother had long since stopped trying to get him to eat a balanced meal. The sugar cheered him up considerably, and was well-worth the looks he got from his classmates because of his bizarre diet.

After lunch, he ambled over to the laboratory section of the school for chemistry, then it was back to the standard classrooms for physics, the gym or outside for physical education, and finally, English. Which he was also more than fluent in, but was, of course, required.

English and Japanese were the worst classes, he felt, because at least in his other classes, he could stop himself from reading ahead so he didn't get too bored (it worked, barely). But when you're fluent, you're fluent, and there's not much else to do about it. Especially for someone like L, who, besides Japanese and English, also spoke Korean, Chinese, and Spanish. (He also spoke French and could speak Arabic passably, but when he said stuff like that, people just thought he was bragging.) (Which he was.)

At any rate, English was far from his favorite subject. So far, in fact, that he spent most of his time staring out the window when usually he found that sort of thing to be more boring even than what was actually going on inside the classroom. He translated when called upon, of course, and he could feel his classmates' hostility as he read easily, effortlessly, even, with a clear, even accent and no fumbling with longer words or hard consonants.

Luckily, he didn't care about them at all. He didn't care about much, actually, except for keeping himself entertained, which wasn't easy. But it was attainable, to some degree, so he mostly focused on that.

For the moment, though, he found himself staring out the window, eyes flitting from one piece of scenery to the next, to trees and benches he'd already memorized to the windows of other classrooms where he could see most of the students paying attention but a few like him, staring blankly out a window.

And it was because he was focusing almost completely on the world outside his banal classroom that he happened to see a black notebook flutter to the ground out of nowhere. He raised his eyebrows and glanced up to the sky. He could see nothing.

Well, that was sort of interesting.

A/N: Okay, guys, here's L! Whew, it took me a while to get his character right; and he's still definitely a work in progress, much more so than Raito; L is just such a singular person, and that's hard to get down even when I'm writing him normally.

Anyway, I did have fun writing this, and even though I know it was a lot of heavy-handed exposition, I promise the story's going to start to move—fast.

Also, if you think you know what's going to happen next . . . okay, you're probably right. But AFTER that, I bet you'll be surprised. You'll see what I mean. Eventually.

Last but not least: to people who have asked, I definitely have every intention of finishing Disorder, but I'm just a little stuck. Still working on it, though. Also: if anyone has my old story, **Ignorance** recorded somehow, I'd love you if you were to let me know and send it to me! I miss it.

If you liked, please review! Thanks!